

## DID DUḤŚĀSANA EVER DRAG DRAUPADĪ TO THE ASSEMBLY HALL?

*By*

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**1. Introduction:** It is well-known that the text of the Critical Edition of the Mahābhārata<sup>1</sup> contains inconsistencies. Recently, using close examination of the text as a tool, several attempts have been made to study those inconsistencies. The present article may be viewed as a contribution to that study. The article concerns one of the famous episodes from the Mahābhārata, the episode in which Duḥśāsana holds a rajasvalā Draupadī by her hair and, in spite of her pleadings, drags her to the Kuru assembly hall. That episode is well-ingrained in the hearts and minds of the Hindus for over two millennia, and has received considerable scholarly attention too. Nevertheless, as we shall show in this article, there is enough evidence in the present text of the Mahābhārata to conclude that, in an earlier version of the text, Duḥśāsana had nothing to do with Draupadī's appearance in the Kuru assembly hall. This makes that episode an interpolation. Our guess as to how this part of the present text has come about is given in section 8.

**2. Some background and a hiatus in the text:** Before dealing with the episode in question, it may be helpful to provide some background. The dyūta between the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas, described in the Sabhāparvan, comes to an end with the twentieth wager between Yudhiṣṭhira and Śakuni, a wager in which Yudhiṣṭhira stakes Draupadī and loses her. The fifty-eighth adhyāya of the Sabhāparvan closes with a description of that lost wager. The fifty-ninth adhyāya opens with Duryodhana spitefully telling Vidura to fetch Draupadī and make her join his other slave women in doing household menial jobs. However, instead of doing Duryodhana's bidding, Vidura gives him a lecture and tells him that the wager in which Draupadī was staked was invalid since Yudhiṣṭhira was not his own master when he staked her (2.59.4). We now come to the sixtieth adhyāya. This adhyāya contains the episode in question. The adhyāya opens with Duryodhana saying 'यिगस्तु कस्तारम्' and

then telling prātikāmin, an usher, to go to Draupadī and fetch her. So, prātikāmin goes to her and tells her the bad news (2.60.4). After he understands the situation, Draupadī tells prātikāmin to go back and ask Yudhiṣṭhira her famous question (2.60.7). That question is usually referred to as "Draupadī's question" and is commonly understood to be the following: in view of the fact that Yudhiṣṭhira himself had become a slave of the Kauravas when he staked her, is his last wager valid? Stated differently, has she really become a slave of the Kauravas? So, prātikāmin goes back to the assembly hall and relays the question to Yudhiṣṭhira (2.60.8). However, Yudhiṣṭhira – perhaps because he found himself in a bind – provides no answer (2.60.9). Duryodhana then says to prātikāmin, "Let Draupadī come here and ask the question herself so that everyone here can hear what she has to say and what he [meaning, Yudhiṣṭhira] has to say." (2.60.10). A distressed prātikāmin then goes back to Draupadī and respectfully tells her that she is being summoned by the men in the assembly hall (2.60.11-12). Draupadī responds to this with a śloka about supremacy of R"X"ê (2.60.13).<sup>ii</sup>

So far, the narrative is more or less coherent. Next comes a hiatus in the text in the form of two problematic ślokas. Those ślokas are:

युधिष्ठिरस्तु तच्छ्रुत्वा दुर्योधनचिकीर्षितम् । द्रौपद्या॥ संमतं दूतं प्राहिणोऽनन्तरम् ॥ २.६०.१४  
एकवक्त्रा अधोनीची रोदमाना रजस्वला । सभामागम्य पाञ्चाली शशुरस्याग्रतोऽभवत् ॥ १५

Although the text does not tell us what was conveyed to Draupadī by Yudhiṣṭhira's messenger, it was, presumably, a command to come to the assembly hall. Draupadī was rajasvalā when she received this message. Nevertheless, according to these ślokas, Draupadī then went to the assembly hall regardless of her condition and stood before her father-in-law. One can argue that, by asking Draupadī to come to the assembly hall on her own, Yudhiṣṭhira was trying to avoid just the sort of scene that we now find in the present text. The hiatus is not that there is anything inherently wrong with those two ślokas themselves. It is that those two ślokas are inconsistent with what follows then in the text, since the present text then continues as if Draupadī is not already in the assembly hall standing in front of her father-in-law.<sup>iii</sup> For, the very next śloka in the present text stages:

ततस्तेषां मुखमालोक्य राजा दुर्योधनः॥ सूतमुवाच हृष्टः ॥  
इदमेतामानय प्रातिकामिन्प्रत्यक्षमस्या॥ कुरवो ब्रुवन्तु ॥ 2.60.16

But prātikāmin hesitates to go back to Draupadī (2.6.17). So, Duryodhana tells Duḥśāsana to personally go get hold of Draupadī and bring her to the assembly hall (2.60.18). Duḥśāsana goes to the Pāṇḍava quarters in the palace, catches the fleeing Draupadī by her hair, and drags

her to the assembly hall in her single garment (2.60.19-39). We shall refer to the version of the episode represented by this scene as the *Duḥśāsana version*.

The hiatus indicated above is well known. Edgerton, the editor of the Critical Edition of the Sabhāparvan, comments on it thus (CE: 2, xxxi-ii): "Clearly we have here parts of two entirely different versions of the story. In one Yudhiṣṭhira sends a trusted messenger commanding Draupadī to come, and she does so. In the other, Duḥśāsana at Duryodhana's command drags her in by violence". Edgerton then notes the possibility that "the 'original' author or redactor of the text to which all our manuscripts go back knew both versions of the story, and tried to combine them, not very successfully". In his translation of the Sabhāparvan, van Buitenen (1975: 815) comments on the hiatus thus: "Yudhiṣṭhira's sending his acceptable messenger, Draupadī's meek appearance before Dhṛtarāṣṭra, and her immediate translation back to where she was make no sense in the present context: nevertheless this *śloka* episode amidst *triṣṭubhs* may be the remnant of a simpler original. It is further possible to speculate that there was an 'usher version' and a Duḥśāsana version, which have been blended". Other than the two problematic *ślokas* themselves, Edgerton and van Buitenen do not provide any evidence to support their statements. Mehendale (1986, 2001a: 426; 1995, 2001a: 500-1; 2001b: 200) and Hltebeitel (2001: 244-5) have also commented on this hiatus. Although they have varied things to say about the matter, their position can be described succinctly, if a bit inaccurately, as follows: irrelevant insertion and a difficult reading, respectively<sup>vi</sup>. Both of them do not have anything to say about a possible version based on the role of *prātikāmin*.

We shall call the version of the episode represented by the two problematic *ślokas* (2.60.14-5) as the *Yudhiṣṭhira version* – it being understood that those *ślokas* were preceded by some others explaining how Yudhiṣṭhira was able to fathom Duryodhana's intentions -, and call the version in which *prātikāmin* forcibly brings Draupadī in the assembly hall against her will as the *prātikāmin version*. Admittedly, there is nothing definitive in the present text of *adhyāya* (2.60) to conclude that the *prātikāmin* version in the sense defined above ever existed. However, that, as we proceed to show, is not the whole story.

### 3. Evidence of the *prātikāmin* version

The scene in which Duḥśāsana holds a *rajasvalā* Draupadī by her hair and, in spite of her pleadings, drags her to the assembly hall in her single garment is drama at its very best. It leaves an indelible impression on

the minds of the readers. That, in turn, creates a tendency to read all references to Draupadī's travails in the Kuru assembly hall in the context of that scene – a tendency so pronounced that one supplies the connection on one's own even when the text says nothing of the sort<sup>vii</sup>. However, if one looks past that dramatic scene and considers the way Draupadī's appearance in the Kuru assembly hall is handled in the rest of the epic, one finds two types of inconsistencies.

The first type of inconsistencies concerns, what may be called, the litany of wrong-doings of the Kauravas. This litany is recited, in its shorter or longer form, by the characters from the Pāṇḍava side on a number of occasions in the story; and Draupadī's maltreatment in the Kuru assembly hall is one of the main items in that litany. Since the present text tells us that Duḥśāsana dragged Draupadī to the assembly hall (and that, a little later, he tried to disrobe her there)<sup>viii</sup>, one expects Duḥśāsana to be the object of censure in that context. Now, there are places in the present text where it is unambiguously stated in censorious terms that Duḥśāsana dragged Draupadī to the Kuru assembly hall. However, considering the gravity of the offense, and considering the frequency with which the litany of wrong-doings of the Kauravas is recited in the text, such places are surprisingly few. And, as we shall see in the later part of the article, there are passages in the present text where Duḥśāsana is mentioned in censorious tone for using harsh word to Draupadī and to Bhīma – without so much as a passing reference to the infinitely more grievous affronts of dragging Draupadī to the assembly hall (and attempting to disrobe her there)! What one finds in the text is that, most of the time, Duryodhana alone is blamed for Draupadī's appearance in the assembly hall<sup>ix</sup>. These inconsistencies – along with the hiatus in the text, mentioned above – raise doubts about the originality of the Duḥśāsana version. However, if these were the only inconsistencies, we doubt that they would have led to any definitive conclusion. The second type of inconsistencies concerns the role of prātikāmin in Draupadī's appearance in the Kuru assembly hall. There are the inconsistencies that are decisive.

The present text contains five explicit references to prātikāmin that do not dovetail with the Duḥśāsana version of the episode. We present them in the order in which they appear in the text.

The first of these references occurs in the seventy-second adhyāya of the Sabhāparvan. There, Saṃjaya recounts Duryodhana's villainy to Dhṛtarāṣṭra thus:

चार्यमाणोऽपि भीष्मेण द्रोणेन विदुरेण च ।



पाण्डवानां प्रियां भार्या द्रौपदीं धर्मचारिणीम् ॥ 2.72.6

प्राहिणोदानयेहेति पुत्रो दुर्योधनस्तव ।

सूतपुत्रं सुमन्दात्मा निर्लज्जः॥ प्रातिकामिनम् ॥ 2.72.7

When one reads this, one is puzzled. Why is Saṃjaya talking in censorious terms about what Duryodhana had asked prātikāmin to do? Had not prātikāmin hesitated, and had not Duryodhana then sent Duḥśāsana to get hold of Draupadī and bring her to the assembly hall? So, should not Saṃjaya mention Duḥśāsana rather than prātikāmin in his censure? Usually, such questions are either brushed aside or are answered with some sort of rationalization. It is only when one sets aside preconceptions about the roles of prātikāmin and Duḥśāsana in that episode and takes these śloka at their face value that the question occurs to one: could it be that, according to the text at an earlier time, prātikāmin had actually obeyed Duryodhana's command in śloka (2.60.16), quoted earlier, and had forcibly brought Draupadī to the assembly hall against her will? Although this reference, all by itself, does not provide enough information to answer that question, it is a good start.

Let us leave it at that and turn to the next reference to prātikāmin. That reference occurs at the beginning of the Āraṇeya episode in the Āraṇyakaparvan. We proceed to recall the relevant part of that episode.

The araṇi belonging to a Brahmin had somehow gotten entangled in the antlers of a stag, and the stag had run away with it. The brahmin then approached the Pāṇḍavas and asked them to retrieve his araṇi so that his i[BS""pue" would not get spoiled. To do the brahmin's bidding, the Pāṇḍava brothers went after the stag and, after finding him, tried to kill him. But all their arrows and javelins somehow missed the stag. Worse, the stag disappeared after a while, and they found themselves deep in the woods. Tired, hungry, thirsty, and dejected because they had failed at what they considered their duty – getting back the brahmin's araṇi – they sat under a banyan tree. Then Nakula, stricken with sorrow, angrily asked Yudhiṣṭhira:

नास्मिन्कुले जातु ममज्ज धर्मो न चालस्यादर्धलोपो बभूव ।

अनुत्तरा॥ सर्वभूतेषु भूय॥ संप्राप्ता॥ स्म॥ संशयं केन राजन् ॥ 3.295.17

It should be noted that Nakula was not talking about their personal safety or discomfort. He was talking about the disaster they had met in fulfilling their obligation to the Brahmin. Yudhiṣṭhira's answer to Nakula's question was:

नापदामस्ति मर्यादा न निमित्तं न कारणम् ।

धर्मस्तु विभजत्यत्र उभयो॥ पुण्यपापयो॥ ॥ 3.296.1

Although one can interpret the second hemistich of this śloka in several different ways, Yudhiṣṭhira's answer amounts to this: although the reason bad things happen to one has something to do with the way R"X"ê connects one's past actions and their consequences in the future for one, it is hard to fathom that connection in any specific case. However, Nakula's other brothers also had answer to his question; and it is those answers that are of far more interest. The text states those answers thus:

भीम उवाच

प्रातिकाम्यनयत्कृष्णां समायां प्रेष्यवत्तदा ।

न मया निहतस्तत्र तेन प्राप्ता॥ स्म संशयम् ॥ ३.२९६.२

अर्जुन उवाच

वाचस्तीक्ष्णास्थिमेदिन्य॥ सूतपुत्रेण भाषिता॥ ।

अतितीक्ष्णा मया क्षान्तास्तेन प्राप्ता॥ स्म संशयम् ॥ ३.२९६.३

सहदेव उवाच

शकुनिस्त्वां यदाजैषीदक्षत्तेन भारत ।

स मया न हतस्तत्र तेन प्राप्ता॥ स्म संशयम् ॥ ३.२९६.४

What is passing through the minds of these three Pāṇḍava brothers is the dyūta and its aftermath. And what each of them has expressed is far more than a regret. They do not seem to disagree with the import of Yudhiṣṭhira's answer in general. However, they seem to think that, in the present case, they understand the reason R"X"ê has wrought this disaster for them, the disaster being their failure to get back the brahmin's araṇi. it is, they think, a punishment for – at the very least, a consequence of – their failure in the past to perform a supremely important deed that they should have performed as a matter of duty; and to each one's mind has come one such deed he himself should have performed in the past. The deeds cited by Arjuna and Sahadeva hold no surprises. They are consistent with their vows in the aftermath of the anudyūta, and also with their 'share' in the war that takes place later in the story. However, the deed cited by Bhīma is nothing short of astonishing. First of all, he clearly states that prātikāmin brought Kṛṣṇā [i.e., Draupadī] to the assembly hall like a slave<sup>xii</sup>. This contradicts the Duḥśāsana version of the episode. Secondly, if Bhīma had wanted to kill some in the aftermath of the dyūta and had asked us to nominate a fitting candidate, then, based on the present text, we would have nominated Duḥśāsana, with Duryodhana running a close second. Who would have thought of the peon prātikāmin ! Obviously, the śloka in question not only shows that the present version

of how Draupadī arrived in the assembly hall is an interpolation but also shows that, in an earlier version of the aftermath of the dyūta, the most atrocious thing to happen to Draupadī in the Kuru assembly hall was that prātikāmin brought her to the assembly hall like a slave. Demeaning to Draupadī and to the Pāṇḍavas as the deed ascribed to prātikāmin is, it is not in the same league as the barbaric behavior of Duḥśāsana that we find in the present text.

The next reference to prātikāmin occurs in the Kīcakavadha episode in the Virāṭaparvan. There, Draupadī, in describing her travails to Bhīma, says:

यन्मां दासीप्रवादेन प्रातिकामी तदानयत् ।  
 सभायां पार्षदो मध्ये तन्मां दहति भारत ॥ ४.१७.२  
 पार्थिवस्य सुता नाम का नु जीवेत मादृशी ।  
 अनुभूय भृशं दुःखमन्यत्र द्रौपदीं प्रभो ॥ ४.१७.३  
 वनवासगतायाम् सैन्यवेन दुरात्मना ।  
 परामर्शं द्वितीयं च सोढुमुत्सहते नु का ॥ ४.१७.४

As in Bhīma's statement in the Āraṇeya, Draupadī's statement that prātikāmin brought her to the assembly hall clearly contradicts the story in the present text<sup>xiii</sup>. It is hard to dismiss this reference and the previous one as a mistake of some sort. For, at the time these passages were composed, if the text had Duḥśāsana drag a rajasvalā Draupadī to the assembly hall, how likely is it that the composer would have made a mistake and ascribed that deed to prātikāmin?

The reference under consideration also sheds light on another related and important matter. It should be clear by now that, in an earlier version of the episode, prātikāmin had brought Draupadī to the assembly hall. So, did she go with him willingly? If not, how did prātikāmin manage to get her there? The intense humiliation contained in Draupadī's words, and her reference to being seized by Jayadratha<sup>xiv</sup> as the *second* such experience indicate that prātikāmin had not managed to get her to the assembly hall by making a polite request. He had used force (although what exactly passed between them in this version of the episode can not be determined). This explains why Bhīma, in the Āraṇeya episode, thought that he should have killed prātikāmin right there in the assembly hall. It also explains Bhīma's remarks about prātikāmin in the remaining two references, discussed below.

The remaining two references to prātikāmin occur in Bhīma's spirited challenges to Duryodhana just before the commencement of the

mortal maceduel between them (9.32.37-45; 9.55.28-34)<sup>xv</sup>. These two reference use identical words:

प्रातिकामी तथा पापो द्रौपद्या॥ क्लेशकृत्॥ । ९.३२.४३, ९.५५.३३

These references are of interest for two reasons, First, according to the present text, prātikāmin has not been disrespectful to Draupadī. Indeed, in his conversation with Draupadī, prātikāmin has used the epithet राजपुत्री for her and the epithet लघीयस् for Duryodhana in (2.60.1);<sup>xvi</sup> and those epithets say volumes about his attitude towards them. All he has actually done according to the present text is to convey Duryodhana's message to Draupadī. Being called the present text is to convey 'पाप॥' and 'द्रौपद्या॥ क्लेशकृत्' for doing just that much seems unduly harsh, if not vindictive. Secondly, Bhīma, in his challenges to Duryodhana has named all the major warriors from the Kaurava side that were killed by the Pāṇḍavas up to that time. Not only Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Karṇa and Śalya are mentioned, but so is Śakuni. Surprisingly, Duḥśāsana is not mentioned by Bhīma<sup>xvii</sup>. And then, one finds prātikāmin spitefully mentioned by Bhīma! as 'द्रौपद्या॥ क्लेशकृत्' at that! It is hard not to conclude that those challenges were written at a time when the text had prātikāmin – not Duḥśāsana – bring Draupadī to the assembly hall in so objectionable a manner as to provoke Bhīma's ire. This reinforces the conclusion reached above that, in an earlier version of the episode, prātikāmin had used force in bringing Draupadī to the assembly hall.

Now that we have seen all the evidence in favor of the prātikāmin version, we mention a comment of Mehendale (1990: 62) that seems to go against the existence of that version. While commenting on śloka (3.296.2) from the Āraṇeya episode, quoted above, Mehendale notes that the śloka contradicts the well-known (Duḥśāsana) version of the event. However, he regards this as a superficial contradiction (वरवर वाटणारी विसंगती). To resolve it, he offers the following suggestion : "इये 'प्रातिकामी'ची अर्थ 'दूत' असा करणे आणि त्या शब्दाने दुःशासन अभिप्रेत आहे असे म्हणणे उचित ठरेल. तसे केले म्हणजे विसंगती उरत नाही". (Authors' translation : Here, it would be appropriate to take the word 'प्रातिकामिन्' to mean 'दूत' and understand that word to mean दुःशासन. There remains no contradiction if that is done). Although Mehendale does not state so explicitly, that suggestion is also applicable to the other four references to प्रातिकामिन्, quoted above. However, it is difficult to agree with this suggestion. For, दुःशासन is hardly a 'दूत'; he is one of the prominent Dhārtarāṣṭras. Moreover, if a redactor



wanted to say 'Ql:ōpp\_"S"' in any of these instances, there seems no conceivable reason – **except, perhaps, in (2.72.7), not even a metrical one** – why he should beat around the bush and use 'प्रतिकामिन्' instead. **And प्रतिकामिन् can not be taken as दुःशासन in (2.72.7), cited above Ql:ōpp\_"S" is not a सूतपुत्र!**

The evidence presented above shows – we think, beyond a reasonable doubt – that the prātikāmin version of the episode (in the sense defined earlier) existed at one time, and that the Duḥśāsana version we now have in the present text was invested and interpolated at a later date<sup>xiii</sup>.

#### 4. Some comments on the prātikāmin version:

1. The present text may contain passages that were composed before the Duḥśāsana version of the episode was invented, but are hard to identify as such because they have been 'fixed' by later redactors to conform with the Duḥśāsana version<sup>xix</sup>.

2. In the prātikāmin version, prātikāmin clearly had more of an involvement in Draupadī's appearance in the Kuru assembly hall than can be accounted for by the present text. One has to assume that the part of the earlier text describing that involvement has not been inadvertently lost but has been deliberately deleted from the text so that the Duḥśāsana version could be introduced. This presumed deletion contradicts the way the text of the Mahābhārata is generally assumed to have passed from the hands of one generation to those of the next generation over the millennia. For, it is generally believed that the redactors of the Mahābhārata did not intentionally delete any part of the text they received,<sup>xx</sup> not even those parts that they found inconsistent, objectionable, or contrary to the additions they were making. It seems that the practice of not deleting received material from the text was not firmly established when the Duḥśāsana version was introduced. That, in turn, shows that the Duḥśāsana version was introduced quite early in the development of the text<sup>xxi</sup>.

3. The presumed deletion, noted above, is nettlesome<sup>xxii</sup>. It also leads to the question: why did the redactors delete just that much and not delete, at the same time, the explicit references to the prātikāmin version, quoted in section 3? We venture the following answer: those explicit references to the prātikāmin version have survived in the text, initially because of oversight and later because of the rule about not deleting received things.

4. In the Duḥśāsana version, Duḥśāsana holds a rajasvalā Draupadī by her hair and drags her to the assembly hall. Since the Duḥśāsana version is a replacement for the prātikāmin version, it is natural to ask: in the prātikāmin version, did prātikāmin also hold Draupadī by her hair while bringing her to the assembly hall? And was she rajasvalā in that version too? The present text does not provide any clues – at least, we could not find any – to answer the first question. As for the second question, the answer seems to be in the affirmative. For, Dhṛtarāṣṭra's speech in 2.72.8-36 is a response to Saṃjaya's reference to prātikāmin (2.72.6-7), quoted earlier, and Dhṛtarāṣṭra's speech contains a reference to Draupadī being clad in a single garment (2.72.13-5). Similarly, Bhīma's challenges before the commencement of his mortal maceduel with Duryodhana, referred to earlier, contain a reference to prātikāmin and a reference to Draupadī being rajasvalā (9.32.38; 9.55.29). Based on these speeches, it seems likely that Draupadī was depicted as rajasvalā in the prātikāmin version too. That she is depicted as rajasvalā in the Yudhiṣṭhira version too adds weight to that argument<sup>xxiii</sup>.

5. Were there other versions of the episode? As seen above, the Duḥśāsana version in the present text is an interpolation: it replaced the earlier prātikāmin version. However, it appears that the prātikāmin version itself was an interpolation. For, consider the dialogue between prātikāmin and Draupadī when prātikāmin goes to her a second time. The text states that dialogue thus:

वैशंपायन उवाच

स गत्वा राजभवनं दुर्योधनवशानुगः ।

उवाच द्रौपदी सूतः ॥ प्रतिकामी व्ययन्निव ॥ २.६०.११

सभ्यास्त्वमी राजपुत्र्याह्वयन्ति मन्ये प्राप्तः ॥ संक्षयः ॥ कौरवाणाम् ।

न वै समृद्धिं पालयते लघीयान्यत्त्वं सभामेव्यसि राजपुत्रि ॥ २.६०.१२

द्रौपद्युवाच

एवं नूनं व्यदधात्संविधाता स्पर्शाबुधौ स्पृशतो धीरबालौ

धर्मं त्वेकं परमं प्राह लोके स नः ॥ शर्मं वास्यति गोप्यमानः ॥ २.६०.१३

As noted earlier, although prātikāmin did deliver Duryodhana's message to Draupadī, it is hard to find faults with his behavior<sup>xxiv</sup>. Equally important is Draupadī's response in 2.60.13. In it, Draupadī seems to be talking more to herself rather than to prātikāmin, and her fantastic words there can hardly be described as those of someone who has been insulted or is under duress. She appears to saying to herself, "This is fated. So, let us go to the assembly hall and see what happens.

We have always behaved in accord with धर्म. So, धर्म will take care of us now". Indeed, one almost expects Vaiśampāyana to state in the next śloka that she thus put her faith in धर्म and went to the assembly hall with prātikāmin. Of course, what comes next in the present text is nothing of the sort. Instead, we have there the hiatus explained earlier.

Let us call the version of the episode in which Draupadī, putting her faith in धर्म, comes to the assembly hall with prātikāmin without being forced by him in any way *the Draupadī version* of the episode. Notice: although Draupadī has come to the assembly hall without being forced in the Draupadī version as well as in the Yudhiṣṭhira version, those two versions are different: in the Yudhiṣṭhira version, Draupadī comes to the assembly hall because of Yudhiṣṭhira's message, not because she was putting her faith in धर्म. Now, it is true that, unlike the Yudhiṣṭhira version, the present text contains no direct evidence of the Draupadī version. However, as seen before, something from an earlier text was deleted at the location of the hiatus to make room for the Duḥśāsana version of the episode. Is it possible that, among the deleted things, there were ślokas after (2.60.13) stating that Draupadī put her faith in धर्म and came to the assembly hall with prātikāmin on her own?

We shall return to this point in section 7. For the moment, let us set it aside and turn to the Yudhiṣṭhira version and the problematic ślokas (2.60.14-5). Obviously, just as the Duḥśāsana version of the episode does not account for those problematic ślokas, neither does the prātikāmin version, discussed in section 3. Now, apart from ślokas (2.60.14-5), the present text does not contain any clear and direct evidence – at least, we were not able to find any – that the Yudhiṣṭhira version existed at one time. However, as in the case of the Draupadī version, is it possible that the relevant ślokas were deleted?

**6. To which version do these passages belong?** The five passages quoted in section 3 clearly belong to the prātikāmin version. However, the present text contains several other passages that do not conform with the Duḥśāsana version but are harder to place in terms of versions. For, consider the verbs the text repeatedly uses to refer to Draupadī's travails. It uses the verb नी, with or without the prefix आ, to describe how Draupadī arrived in the assembly hall: the verb क्लिष्ट, with or without the prefix परि, to state that she was tormented there; and the verb कृष्ट, with or without a prefix such as परि, to describe that she was dragged there. Although these passages are commonly read in the context of the Duḥśāsana version, few of them explicitly mention Duḥśāsana. Usually, in such passages, the text

uses passive voice and does not state who did those things to Draupadī; and, as noted earlier, one often finds that Duryodhana alone is blamed in them for those actions. The context of some of these passages makes it clear that they belong to the Duḥśāsana version. However, in case of some others, it is harder to say anything more than that they appear to have been composed before the Duḥśāsana version was invented. We provide some examples.

Our first example comes from the Āraṇyakaparvan. After hearing that Arjuna had gone to the Indraloka, an agitated Dhṛtarāṣṭra tells Saṃjaya that, due to foolishness of Duryodhana, a great calamity is going to occur in the future (3.46.2-18). Saṃjaya is, of course, in complete agreement with this evaluation (3.46.19-31)<sup>xxv</sup>. Among other things, he tells Dhṛtarāṣṭra:

मनुना हि समाविष्टा॥ पाण्डवास्तेऽमितौजसः॥ ।  
 दृष्ट्वा कृष्णां समां नीतां धर्मपत्नीं यशस्विनीम् ॥ ३.४६.२०  
 दुःशासनस्य ता वाच॥ श्रुत्वा ते दारुणोदया॥ ।  
 कर्णस्य च महाराज न स्वप्स्यन्तीति मे मतिः॥ ॥ ३.४६.२१

Notice: although the text states that Draupadī was brought/led (नीता) to the assembly hall, it does not state that it was Duḥśāsana who did it. Moreover, although Saṃjaya mentions Duḥśāsana in a censorious tone, it is merely for using harsh words. If the text at the time these śloka were composed had Duḥśāsana drag a rajasvalā Draupadī to the assembly hall, what would the composers blame Duḥśāsana for – his harsh words or his dastardly deed <sup>xxvi</sup>? And what would they make the Pāṇḍavas lose their sleep over – Duḥśāsana's mere words, no matter how harsh, or his deed that cries to high heaven for revenge?

Our next example comes from the भगवद्गीता section of the Udyogaparvan. We recall the relevant part of that section. Kṛṣṇa has arrived in the Hāstinapura to mediate the dispute between the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas. In front of the full Kuru court, he has made the case that the Pāṇḍavas should be returned their kingdom. The supporting speeches by Rāma Jāmadagnya, Kaṇva and Nārada are over. After those speeches, Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Bhīṣma and Droṇa have advised Duryodhana to make peace with the Pāṇḍavas. And ignoring all this advocacy and advice, Duryodhana has just declared that he is not going to give the Pāṇḍavas 'even as much of his land as can be pierced with the tip of a sharp needle' (5.125.26). He has also said that he has not done anything wrong, and that he is being unfairly blamed. This is when Kṛṣṇa loses his temper and recites to Duryodhana the whole litany of wrong-doings of the Kauravas, including Duryodhana's own attempts in his childhood to



kill the Pāṇḍavas (5.126.1-20). Never one to mince his words where the Kauravas were concerned, Kṛṣṇa is telling off Duryodhana in spades. And this is what he had to say to Duryodhana on that occasion about Draupadī and Duḥśāsana:

कम्बान्यो ज्ञातिभार्या वै विप्रकर्तुं तयार्हति ।  
 आनीय च सभां वक्तुं यथोक्ता द्रौपदी त्वया ॥ ५.१२६.८  
 कुलीना शीलसंपन्ना प्राणेभ्योऽपि गरीयसी ।  
 महिषी पाण्डुपुत्राणां तया विनिकृता त्वया ॥ ५.१२६.९  
 जानन्ति कुरुवं सर्वे यथोक्ताः कुरुसंसदि ।  
 दुःशासनेन कौन्तेयाः प्रव्रजन्तः परंतपः ॥ ५.१२६.१०

Once again, the text does not tell us who brought Draupadī to the assembly hall and, once again, Duḥśāsana is mentioned in censorious tone for what he said to the Pāṇḍavas in the aftermath of the *anudyūta*<sup>xxvii</sup>. Granted, Duḥśāsana is not Kṛṣṇa's primary target here. He is berating Duryodhana. Nevertheless, Kṛṣṇa has not completely ignored Duḥśāsana. It is then of significance that Kṛṣṇa's speech contains no mention of Duḥśāsana's dastardly treatment of Draupadī. He is being censured by Kṛṣṇa merely for his harsh words.

Our last example is from the Śalyaparvan. We have already referred to Bhīma's spirited challenges to Duryodhana just before the commencement of the mace-duel between them (9.32.37-45; 9.55.28-34). Draupadī's plight in the Kuru assembly hall is mentioned in those challenges in almost identical terms:

द्रौपदी च परिक्लिष्टा सभामध्ये रजस्वला । ९.३२.३८  
 द्रौपदी च परिक्लिष्टा सभायां यद्रजस्वला । ९.५५.२९

Now, as noted before, Bhīma's challenges mention *prātikāmin* and do not name Duḥśāsana. How likely is it then that the preceding hemi-stitches refer to the Duḥśāsana version of the episode<sup>xxviii</sup>?

Clearly, if one can figure out the versions to which these passages belong then, they, in turn, can be used as further evidence of the existence of those versions. Now, one can say with a degree of confidence that the third example, the one from Bhīma's spirited challenges to Duryodhana, belongs to the *prātikāmin* version. Based on the words *सभां नीताम्* in (3.46.20) and the words *आनीय* in (5.126.8), we hazard the guess that the other two examples also belong to the *prātikāmin* version.

**7. Kuntī's curious censures:** Since the point under discussion is important and has not been noticed before, one more illustrative example

of the sort given in section 6 may not be out of place. This one comes from Kuntī's well known message from the W<sup>Bp</sup>\<sup>ÜpS</sup> section of the Udyogparvan (5.130-5). We recall that Kuntī's message was for the Pāṇḍavas, and was sent to them with Kṛṣṇa when Kṛṣṇa's embassy failed, and he was about to return from Hāsitnapura to the Pāṇḍava camp in Upaplavya. The main part of Kuntī's message is for Yudhiṣṭhira. It is a severe reprimand for his past conduct, and a call to arms to regain his lost kingdom regardless of the odds of success or the consequences of failure. There is no mention of Draupadī in that part of her message. However, Kuntī also has messages for her other sons and for her daughter-in-law; and the closing part of those messages concerns Draupadī's plight in the Kuru assembly hall (5.135.15-21). It is clear from Kuntī's poignant words there that, being a woman, she could put herself in Draupadī's shoes, and that she was still outraged and smarting, nay, seething from those old affronts to her daughter-in-law. This is what she had to say to Kṛṣṇa about Draupadī's presence in that assembly hall:

यच्च व॥ प्रेक्षमाणानां सर्वधर्मोपचायिनी ।  
 पाञ्चाली परुषाप्युक्ता को नु तत्क्षन्तुमर्हति ॥ ५.१३५.१५  
 न राज्यहरणं दुःखं घृते चापि पराजयः ।  
 प्रव्राजनं सुतानां वा न मे तदुःखकारणम् ॥ ५.१३५.१६  
 यतु सा बृहती श्यामा सभायां रुदती तदा ।  
 अश्रीवीत्यरुषा वाचस्तन्मे दुःखतरं मतम् ॥ ५.१३५.१७

The first of these śloka is part of Kuntī's message to the Mādreyas, and the other two śloka are a part of her ongoing conversation with Kṛṣṇa <sup>xxix</sup>. We emphasize that the above-quoted śloka is all that Kuntī had to say on the matter. Clearly, Kuntī's words contain a censure of the Kauravas for the way they maltreated Draupadī in the aftermath of the dyūta. However, would Kuntī merely say पाञ्चाली परुषाप्युक्ता and अश्रीवीत्यरुषा वाच: if Draupadī had been forcibly brought to the assembly hall either by prātikāmin or by Duḥśāsana<sup>xxx</sup>? Kuntī's later comment to Kṛṣṇa from this part of her message is also of interest. Kuntī tells him,

तयोश्चैतदवज्ञानं यत्सा कृष्णा सभागता ।  
 दुःशासनश्च यद्भीमं कटुकान्यभ्यभाषत ।  
 पश्यतां कुरुवीराणं तच्च संस्मारये ॥ पुनः ॥ ५.१३५.२१

The word तयोः in this śloka refers to Bhīma and Arjuna. Notice: the śloka does not say that Draupadī was *brought* to the assembly hall. For, the words यत्सा कृष्णा सभागता literally mean 'when Kṛṣṇa came to the assembly hall by force? (And, if Duḥśāsana had dragged Draupadī to the

Kuru assembly hall, would she not mention what he had done to Draupadī rather than to Bhīma?)

These passages from Kuntī's message do not seem to belong to either the prātikāmin version or the Duḥśāsana version. Among the remaining two versions, we feel they belong to the Draupadī version of the episode, thus providing further proof of the existence of that version.

**8. Putting things together:** In contrast to the evidence of the prātikāmin version, the evidence of the Draupadī version and the Yudhiṣṭhira version, presented above, is weaker than desired. Nevertheless, weak as it is, we think it shows that both those versions existed at one time and that they were then conflated. This accounts for the appearance of the two problematic ślokas (2.60.14-5) right after ślokas (2.60.11-3). Now that Draupadī was in the assembly hall, the next thing in this conflated text was, presumably, Bhīṣma's speech (which appears in the present text as ślokas 2.60.40-42). Some later redactors then introduced the prātikāmin version. To incorporate it in the text they had received, they, presumably, inserted appropriate things between the two problematic ślokas and Bhīṣma's speech. However, for some reason one can only speculate about, they left intact the two problematic ślokas themselves and the part of the Draupadī version that preceded them. And at a later time, some other redactors then replaced the prātikāmin version by the Duḥśāsana version. They, presumably, reworked the portion between the two problematic ślokas and Bhīṣma's speech, leaving the problematic ślokas and what preceded them, once again, intact. This is how, we think, the present text of (2.60.1-42) has come about. The motive in introducing the prātikāmin version and the Duḥśāsana version seems to be to enhance the dramatic impact of the episode and, at the same time, further blacken the Kauravas.

Among the alternative scenarios, are two that may deserve attention. The first one concerns the contact of the Yudhiṣṭhira version. In the preceding discussion, we have assumed that, in the Yudhiṣṭhira version, the problematic ślokas (2.60.14-5) were preceded by some other explaining how Yudhiṣṭhira was able to fathom Duryodhana intentions. However, it is just as likely that the text had the Draupadī version to begin with and, in introducing the Yudhiṣṭhira version, the only change the redactors made was to replace the earlier ślokas stating that Draupadī came to the assembly hall on her own by ślokas (2.60.14-5). In that case, the Yudhiṣṭhira version would become a modification of the Draupadī version rather than an independent version that could be conflated with the Draupadī version. The second scenario is the one mentioned by Edgerton (CE: 2, xxxi-ii). To wit: why can one not regard the problematic

śloka (2.60.14-5) as nonsense? Our answer is a counter-question: how likely is it that a nonsense addition will spread to all recensions of the Mahābhārata? We note though that, those śloka are the only unarguable evidence of the Yudhiṣṭhira version. Without them one would not have entertained the idea of the version. Thus, if they are to be discarded as nonsense then the Yudhiṣṭhira version will have to be discarded too. In that case, the evolution of the present text would take a linear form; first, the Draupadī version; then, the pratikāmin version; finally, the Duḥśāsana version.

The amount of guesswork involved in all these statements is obvious. However, that seems to be the best than one can do about it at this stage.

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#### Notes :

<sup>i</sup> Sukthankar et al. (1933-66). In the present article, all references to the text of the the Mahābhārata are to this edition. We shall henceforth refer to it as the Critical Edition, as the CE, or as the present text of the Mahābhārata.

<sup>ii</sup> Ślokas (2.60.11-3) are quoted in section 5.

<sup>iii</sup> In some manuscripts, an attempt has been made to rectify the matters by changing 'W'\"O"o in (2.60.15) to W'\" or to W'\"uO"o ; see (CE: 2, xxxii, 293-4).

<sup>iv</sup> There is a gap in the text here even if one ignores ślokas (2.60.14-5). For, to make sense of (2.60.16), one has to assume that prātikāmin must have come back to the assembly hall alone a second time with some question from Draupadī to be answered, this time, by the Kurus. See Mehendale (1986, 2001a: 426).

<sup>v</sup> van Buitenen does not state with sufficient clarity what he means by an “usher version”. It is thus hard to decide whether his “usher version” is the same as the *prātikāmin* version or the *Draupadī* version in the sense these terms are defined later in this article.

<sup>vi</sup> Mehendale seems also to entertain the idea that, at one time, there existed a *Yudhiṣṭhira* version in the sense defined below, and that the account in the text is a conflation. See Mehendale (1990: 61-2).

<sup>vii</sup> Some such examples occur in section 6.

<sup>viii</sup> The attempted disrobing is an interpolation; see Bhatt (1948-9) and Bhattacharya (2005). That interpolation appears to be of relatively recent vintage.

<sup>ix</sup> For some examples, see (4.45.10-23), (5.76.15-8), (9.60.43). See also, (5.126.8-10), discussed in section 6.

<sup>x</sup> There is nothing in the present text corresponding to this description. This was noted by Mehendale (1990: 59). He regards it as a minor supplement that is provided later in the story. For our interpretation, see end note #20.

<sup>xi</sup> Although the *Dhārtarāṣṭrās* belong to the same कुल, they, apparently, don't count.

<sup>xii</sup> van Buitenen (1975: 797) translates प्रेष्य as servant. Our translation of प्रेष्य as slave fits the context. Also, it agrees with Ganguli (1883-96: 3, *Vana Parva*, Part 2.601) and Johnson (2005:283).

<sup>xiii</sup> van Buitenen (1978: 534) and Garbutt (2006: 485) have noted this inconsistency. However, they do not go any further than that.

<sup>xiv</sup> See (3.248-56) for this episode. Ślokas (3.252.22-4) leave no doubt that *Draupadī* was physically seized and manhandled by *Jayadratha*.

<sup>xv</sup> These passages have substantial overlap with each other.

<sup>xvi</sup> This śloka is quoted in section 5.

<sup>xvii</sup> *Bhīma*'s speeches contain the following hemi-stitches: भ्रातरस्ते हता॥ शूरा॥ पुत्राश्च सहसैनिका॥ । ९.३२.४२इ भ्रातरस्ते हता॥ शूरा विक्रान्तयोधिन॥ । 9.55.33. That, of course, covers *Duḥśāsana*. If that looks strage, recall that the *Duḥśāsanavadha* episode in the *Kaṇaparvan* contains no mention of *Draupadī*. We shall have more to say about these matters elsewhere.

<sup>xviii</sup> After the present article was accepted for publication in *ABORI* and was revised once, it came to the attention of the authors that, in an on-line study group on the *Mahābhārata*, Mr. *Indrajit Bandyopadhyay* had also raised the possibility of the *prātikāmin* version in the sense defined above; (see, message # 1192 of April 6, 2007). Mr. *Bandyopadhyay* states, “[N]ow that ‘draupadi-disrobing’ has been conclusively

‘disrobed’, [implicitly referring to Bhattacharya, (2005, 2009)], what if [I] express some doubt whether [D]uhshashana at all dragged her to court? [A]nd another doubt whether [D]raupadi was at all statked in dice in the maner as sabha parva would have us believe? [T]here are at least three references where [D]uhshashana is not blamed for dragging her. [H]owever, if ‘pratikāmin’ can mean [D]uhshashana then I am wrong. [A]lso I have found that in most of the instances where dragging of [D]raupadi is mentioned, there is no metion of [D]uhshashana”! Of the five references to prātikāmin given in the present article, he then cites the appropriate part of the Araṇeya episode, the appropriate part of the Kīcakavadha episode, and the appropriate part of one of Bhīma’s spirited challenges to Duryodhana, (from, we think, (29.32). In a subsequent message, (# 1199), he cites other instances where [D]uhshashana should have been mentioned but is not, including the part of Kuntī’s message discussed in section 7 of the present article. However, it seems, at least to us, that neither Mr. Bandyopadhyay nor the group arrived at any conclusion about the matter, one way or the other; (see message # 1197). Mr Bandyopadhyay has not mentioned the incident from the Sabhāparvan, (2.72), cited earlier in the present article.

<sup>xix</sup> For a likely example, see (5.31.12-23); particularly, (5.31.13,16).

<sup>xx</sup> This is a surmise based on familiarity with manuscripts; see Edgerton (CE: 2, xxxiv) and Mehendale (2001b: 194; 2007: 7). It is also supported by two observations. First, the present text contains inconsistencies which could have been easily removed by deleting a few appropriate ślokaś. Secondly, the present text contains material that the later redactors would have wanted, presumably, to delete but have chosen, instead, to retain and whitewash.

<sup>xxi</sup> Ślokaś (2.72.6-7), quoted earlier in the text, seem to refer to an incident which was in the text at the time of the prātikāmin version, but was deleted while introducing the Duḥśāsana version. In the present text. Droṇa has not said a word throughout the dyūta and the anudyūta episodes.

<sup>xxii</sup> For instance, it makes the categorical claim that nothing ever was deliberately omitted untenable. As a result, the kind of deduction made in Mehendale (2001b: 194) has to be bolstered with further arguments.

<sup>xxiii</sup> See also (5.135.11-22) from Kuntī’s message to the Pāṇḍavas. A part of her message is discussed in section 7.

<sup>xxiv</sup> See also (2.60.3).

<sup>xxv</sup> A part of Saṃjaya’s speech is a blatant later addition. For example, (3.46.29) refers to thirteen years. That speech also contains the following

śloka about Draupadī: आसादितमिदं घोरं तुमुलं लोमहर्षणम् । द्रौपदीं परिकुर्वन्नि॥  
कोपयन्निष पाण्डवान् ॥ 3.46.27. It seems likely that this śloka is also a part of  
that later addition. Cf., (2.72.12).

<sup>xxvi</sup> We think śloka (3.46.21) refers to Duḥśāsana's harsh words in the  
aftermath of the anudyūta (2.68) and refers to Karna's harsh words in the  
aftermath of the dyūta. Karna has not uttered a word in the aftermath of  
the anudyūta. The text contains several other instances where Duḥśāsana  
is censured merely for his harsh words. See, for example (3.225.17),  
(5.88.81).

<sup>xxvii</sup> A little later in the speech, Kṛṣṇa mentions in censorious tone that  
Duryodhana, Duḥśāsana, and Karna made cruel speeches. See (5.126.12).

<sup>xxviii</sup> References in Dhṛtarāṣṭra's speech (2.72.8-36) to Draupadī's plight  
in the Kuru assembly hall are in the same vein. Dhṛtarāṣṭra's speech is in  
response to Saṃjaya's condemnation of Duryodhana, referred to earlier  
in connection with the first explicit reference to the prātikāmin version.

<sup>xix</sup> van Buitenen (1978: 439) takes all these ślokas as a part of Kuntī's  
message to the Mādreyas. However, see Garbutt (2008: 315).

<sup>xxx</sup> Kuntī's earlier conversation with Kṛṣṇa in the Udyogaparvan also  
contain two passages about Draupadī's plight in the assembly hall  
(5.88.48-56; 79-86). These passages have some overlap with the above  
cited passage from her message. In particular, see (5.88.81, 84-5).

<sup>xxxi</sup> Ganguli (1883-96:1998: 4, Udyoga Parva, 266), van Buitenen (1978;  
439), and Garbutt (2008: 315) translate सभागता in this śloka as 'was  
dragged into the assembly', 'was taken to the hall', and 'was taken to the  
court', respectively. We think, they are influenced by the story as we  
have it in the present text. The literal meaning of सभागता is "came to the  
assembly hall". See, Kale (1894:430), Monier-Williams (1899:347).